

COVID-19 PANDEMIC IN INDIA

(extracted from the April Prayer Letter of Ann Bothamley, retired BMS missionary still working at Christian Medical College, Vellore, India)

No doubt you have heard much over the last weeks about the Covid situation in the north of India and that is not surprising but the second wave of the virus is very much with us here in Vellore. Ambulances and cars have been queuing up outside our emergency dept. with patients desperately ill and waiting for beds. We had forty patients waiting for ICU beds one day this week. A friend tells me that when she travels home to Bagayam she continually sees funeral processions making their way to the Palar river for the cremation of their loved ones. The cases continue to rise each day.

Many of our staff have contracted the virus even though they have been vaccinated but at least they have not been seriously ill. Of course they need to isolate, maybe to be admitted or sent home immediately to stay shut in with their families.

Once more I give thanks to God for the way CMCH organised things so wonderfully during the first wave so that we have been prepared. It would be impossible now to get the equipment, beds, ventilators etc that we need but these are all with us. Now items are not available or only on the black market.

At present we have opened 800 Covid beds of which 150 are for ventilated patients or those who might need ventilation. 350 patients are under 'home care' and they are contacted three times each day to assess their condition.

On Monday we opened a new Orthopaedic block which will be called the Paul Brand Block. There will be 250 beds available there for Covid patients and out at the new hospital in Kannigapuram beds will once more be opened gradually as the need arises.

Theatres have nearly all been closed except for emergencies so the staff from there will be utilised for the Covid wards. A training programme is online for all staff in the care of patients.

At present for every 100 patients tested, 70% are Covid positive.

No vaccines are available at the moment. The Gov. has vaccines given freely for Gov. Hospitals but private hospitals including CMCH have to pay for the vaccines and the cost has risen from Rupees 250 to Rupees 400. BUT nothing is available.

I would like to remind you that last year we were able to give more than any other year for our poor patients. There will be many in this second wave who will not have the money to pay for their treatment.

This week we had a day of prayer throughout the hospital for India and the present situation in the country. The administration has organised for meals to be provided for the staff on duty so that they do not have to prepare before coming to hospital. Please do pray especially for the nursing staff. Many of our nurses have to prepare food for the whole family before they come for duty every day. This will be a great help as the canteens are closed on the premises.

Buses have again been organised to collect staff at strategic places.

Yesterday the State Government brought in a partial lockdown with only provision shops available for purchasing from 6am to noon each day. We are not sure for how long this will continue.

This is the current picture in Vellore as Covid rages throughout the population and is difficult to contain.

Response of Friends of Vellore, UK to latest wave in India

I am sure all of you have seen the recent devastating scenes of the terrible situation that India finds itself in, with the second wave of the pandemic. Most of us have had a family member, friend or contact in India that has been affected by this second wave. The distress of patients unable to find hospital beds, relatives struggling to gain access to medication, oxygen or to hospitalisation for family members and most distressingly the agonising sight of those bidding farewell to relatives at mass funeral pyres, is really heart breaking. We, as a charity would like to help CMC Vellore and smaller mission hospitals that work alongside CMC in delivering healthcare to their communities at this difficult time. Following communication with Dr J V Peter, Director of CMC, it appears that the need in the smaller mission hospitals is mainly two-fold. The first, is the supply of oxygen to these institutions. This can be provided by either oxygen generators, which generate a large independent supply of oxygen for the whole hospital, or oxygen concentrators, which are portable machines that produce a smaller supply of oxygen for individual patients. The oxygen generators are the best option but are much more expensive (around £20,000 vs £700 each for a portable machine). The second area, is in helping towards these institutions acquire BiPAP machines, which are portable machines used for non-invasive, ventilatory support which is very effective and useful in the management of ill Covid patients. Towards this end, we as a charity are raising funds to help CMC and smaller mission hospitals to deal with this second wave of the pandemic. We have currently raised over £18,000. We will initially help Kotagiri Medical Fellowship Hospital, a mission hospital high in the hills that CMC have been partnering closely with, to purchase an oxygen generator, costing around £20,000. We are also considering needs at other mission hospitals. We would be grateful if you would consider making a donation towards this cause. If so, please visit our website which has up-to-date information on the campaign here <<http://www.friendsofvellore.org/>> . The link here <<https://friendsofvellore.org/donate-for-covid-support/>> takes you straight to the donation page. We also request that you uphold CMC and the other mission hospitals that are struggling to provide medical care to those affected by this second wave in your prayers.

Kind Regards

Dayalan Clarke Chair of Trustees

(The most recent figure of amount raised is over £100,000! In addition Ann Bothamley has a separate fund for similar equipment for Christian Fellowship Hospital Odanchatram which stands at about £40,000)